



I've been groaning lately. Two weeks ago I had a big plumbing job in the kitchen. I would be sitting on the kitchen floor for long periods of time and when I stood up, it's like my hip joints were on fire. I just so happened to Skype with Tim Seeley after that and I asked him how in the world old guys can do that sort of thing for a living every day! That same week, several of us were at a work project in Wisconsin Dells helping a ministry get ready to serve international students from fifty different nations. Over four thousand international students from fifty nations come to the Dells to work each summer. Isn't it incredible to think that so much diversity ends up right in the middle of Wisconsin? It's an amazing opportunity for ministry. Our job that day was to take pallets apart because they want to cover one wall with old pallet boards as a decoration. As one guy on our team said, wood pallets were made in such a way as to not come apart. I don't think all of our days working on our church building were as tough as that day. In the afternoon, I would take a break and be convinced that I could not take apart one more pallet. It was brutal. Or maybe it's just because I am that much older now. Yes, I've been groaning lately.

Normally, groaning and grumbling are a form of complaining. We all do it, it's just some of us make an art form out of complaining. Grumbling may be one of the most overlooked sins in our churches and homes. But there is such a thing as good groaning that the Bible calls "resurrection groans." Because the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the central truth of our faith, in his great grace, the Lord has extended the resurrection to all believers. When we think of heaven and eternal life, we don't tend to think about our resurrected bodies. As believers, death ushers us into the presence of Jesus but how often do you actually contemplate your future resurrected body? We may not make a big deal out of it, but the Bible does. It just so happens that the next section of Romans chapter eight is about our resurrection and we can't talk about our resurrection without the resurrection of Christ as a foundation.

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

### **1. Sonship requires suffering.**

Last week we looked closely at our adoption as sons by the Holy Spirit. Justification can sound like an impersonal act--like a transaction at the bank. It's actually intensely personal but it may not grab us as personal. But you can't get more personal than the truth of our spiritual adoption. The Father personally selected us. Remember that the word adoptions means a son who is set apart; a son who is chosen. So the Father personally chose us to become his son, to become his daughter. One of the many results is that our heavenly Father cannot condemn his own children. he will lovingly discipline us but he cannot condemn us.

But the second half of verse 17 tells us what comes along with sonship: *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* In other words, sonship requires suffering. No surprise here, right? But it is comforting to know that our suffering is all part of God's greater plan of sonship. And the suffering is what causes the groaning.<sup>1</sup>

I think the winter we all experienced is a good illustration of groaning. This winter was the coldest, hardest winter I have ever been through. I know some of you have lived in Alaska and the U.P., but for me, this was the toughest one yet. We always are ready for Spring weather, but the feeling was palpable this winter, don't you agree? So I think what was happening is that we were 'groaning' for warmer, Spring weather. Now I don't mean to say that a long, cold winter is the same kind of suffering as dying of cancer. that's simply not true. Not to mention the fact that our brutal winter gave us ample reason to complain about the weather. I was actually very convicted about complaining about the cold. I told myself, if I complain when it is -30 then come July I should not complain when the mercury hits 105. I really don't think we should be complaining about the weather because it just teaches us how to complain. I really believe that this is true.

But I also think there is something to this idea of groaning for Spring weather. Especially for us Midwesterners who are used to the change in seasons, we know that we are not meant to live in an eternal winter. There is something deep within us that knows that the winter is supposed to come to an end. We have this inner sense that something better is coming our way. And this is exactly what suffering is supposed to do for us. It reminds us that something better is coming our way. Isn't this what Paul meant in verse 18?

## **2. Suffering pales in the light of our resurrection.**

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

### **CONSIDER**

There are several ways to pull important truths from this verse. The first is the word consider. Hopefully, you will remember this word from chapter four.

*For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:3-5).*

If you have faith in Christ, your faith is counted as righteousness. Do you remember what the word counted means? If you recall, it is an accounting term. It is like a banking ledger. What does your righteousness ledger look like before you are saved? Your righteousness ledger is empty. In fact, it has a negative balance due to our unrighteousness. But *to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.* Based on our faith, God credits righteousness to our account. The negative ledger of unrighteousness is taken away and God puts a positive balance of righteousness in its place. You are "counted" as righteous. You are now considered to be righteous.

This is the same word here. Counted and consider come from the same word. But this time around, you and I have to do the counting, the considering. We have to move the idea of our suffering into the right ledger. Think about 2 ledgers in front of you called good and bad. Suffering is usually sitting in the ledger marked 'bad.' We don't like suffering in any form. No one ever said we are supposed to like it or enjoy it. But we are told to consider it. We are to consider it.

Isn't this what James said about suffering? *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3).* There's that word count again. Consider it, count it all joy. So we need to consider our suffering and move it from the bad ledger to the good ledger. Not that suffering in and of itself is good, but that it always has a good purpose. Consider it to be so. Count it as something that God is superintending. That he has not left us to wander the wasteland of suffering alone and without a plan.

Recently, John Piper was in the hospital for two days. he didn't give the details but he did have 10 lessons to be gained from a time in the hospital. They were all worthwhile but here are the last two.

**9. Let the self-revelation of Jesus as the good physician be sweet to your soul, and preach to yourself that this light momentary affliction is working for you an eternal weight of glory.**

Christ is all-sufficient for every situation. In the hospital, he is preeminently a physician. Matthew 4:23 says he was able to heal “every disease and every affliction among the people.” And at the last day, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Revelation 21:4).

We should ask him, without hesitation, for healing and for relief. We should trust him with the timing of his answer. But mainly we should realize with joy that, beyond all doubt, he has healed the deepest disease of all who trust him — the damning disease of sin. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

**10. Pray that none of these hospital hours, none of this pain, none of these fears, none of these relationships, none of this life-altering season will be wasted.**

Satan wants to make your experience in the hospital meaningless and empty and trivial. Don't let him win this victory.

Pray. Pray as you go. Pray in admissions. Pray on the gurney. Pray in the bed. Pray in the morning and in the middle of the night. Pray without ceasing.

You will probably not be able to formulate long, well-articulated prayers. The mind and body are too embattled. The prayers you need to pray have been called “ejaculatory prayers” historically — short outbursts of the heart.

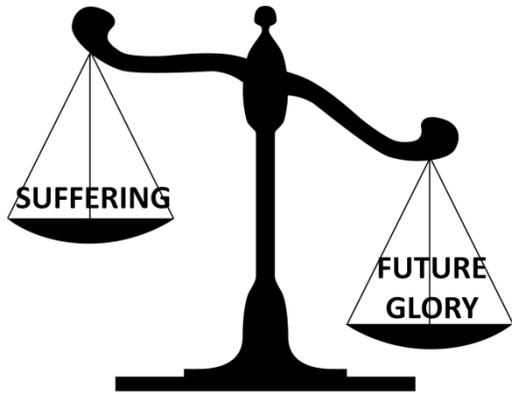
“Help me, Lord, to trust you.” “Have mercy, Lord, I need you. I can hardly think.” “Save me, Lord, from unbelief and sin.” “I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief.” “Thank you for your mercy.” “Thank you, Jesus, that you loved me and gave yourself for me.” “Thank you, Father, that there is no condemnation for me in Christ Jesus.” “Use me, Jesus, to magnify your great worth.” “Satisfy me in your steadfast love, no matter what happens here.”

#### THIS PRESENT TIME

Suffering is only for a season. It is for this present time. The winter season was destined to end. I know it didn't feel like it at times. Sometimes it felt like we were trapped in Narnia under the spell of the White Witch--that it would always be winter but never Christmas. But just as the winter has a season and was destined to end, so our suffering has a season and is destined to end.

#### NOT WORTH COMPARING

The word for this phrase simply means a scale or something that is equivalent. Think of a scale with balanced arms. The two sides are equivalent to one another. But this phrase says NOT equivalent. The two sides are not equal. They are not balanced. And the key to the imbalance is what is on either side of the scale. On one side of the scale is our suffering. This is the totality of all of our suffering. This is what we suffer physically and emotionally and every other way. This also includes our suffering on behalf of others. If a family member suffers in some way, then we will also suffer. So this is one side of the scale. All of our suffering. All of our groaning.



## WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US

But all of that combined suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. So if you have all of life's combined suffering on one side of the scale and our future glory on the other side, they are not equivalent. There is no comparison. That's why I like the Scripture that Piper used from 2 Cor. 4:17 *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* Our eternal weight of glory is weighty. You might think

that the verse in 2 Corinthians uses the same word as here in Romans 8. But it's different. In 2 Corinthians it is a phrase which is literally translated as hyperbole unto hyperbole. It's like taking the word exaggeration and multiplying it times exaggeration. This is the weight of eternal glory that cannot compare to our present suffering.

But what exactly is this future glory? Our inheritance is not an it, it's a He, right? Our ultimate inheritance is Jesus himself. In one sense it is impossible to add anything to this inheritance, but that is what Paul is doing here. The "glory to be revealed to us" is not just Jesus and eternal life, but our resurrected bodies. This is the whole point of verses 19-23. It's not just we who are groaning but creation itself is groaning. Obviously, this is a personification of creation but the point is still the same. For what is the creation groaning?

Look at verse 19. *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* Creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. And what does that mean--the revealing of the sons of God? Verse 23 explains it. *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* Therefore, in verse 19, "the revealing of the sons of God" is the same thing as the "redemption of our bodies" in verse 23. So the creation is groaning for you and I to put on immortality. The creation is groaning until you and I receive our resurrected bodies.

I think as Christians we fail to realize the importance of our resurrected bodies. We view eternity as some kind of ghostly existence where we float around like flying angels. But the Bible will have none of this. Just as Christ was not meant to stay in the grave for more than 3 days, so we are not meant to exist without resurrected bodies.

About two weeks ago I was talking with a conservative Catholic man who is currently dating a Buddhist woman. You may have run into Buddhists living in the Viroqua area and nine times out of ten, for then, Buddhism is just another manifestation of the melting pot of New Age beliefs. But this woman is Asian and was every day of her life growing up, was bound up in her family's Buddhist beliefs. She understands almost nothing about Christianity. There is no resurrection in Buddhist belief. There is a almost never ending cycle of reincarnation, but no ultimate resurrection. The highest state in Buddhist belief is Nirvana which is an ascent into oneness to the degree that you, as an individual, cease to exist. So not only is there no bodily resurrection but there is no you at all. The thing that once was you is like a dash of salt stirred into a giant pot of soup.

But in Biblical Christianity, God has declared that physical bodies are something that will last for all eternity. Not these bodies--at least not the form we have now, but our bodies nonetheless. As much as I would want to have Chris Eisermann's body in eternity--he's a tough lumberjack kind of guy, right--I will actually have this body. A resurrected, immortal body, but my body nonetheless. And this is why I groan. This is not why I complain. I complain because I am an ungrateful sinner. But this is why I groan. I groan while waiting for my resurrected body.

Before I get to some applications, let me point out one more thing from verse 23. It says that we *groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*. Now last week we learned about the wonderful truth of our spiritual adoption but this verse seems to be saying that we are still waiting on our adoption. Adoption is like the rest of our salvation. All aspects of our salvation have an "already but not yet" aspect to them. I have already been saved from the penalty of sin but I am not yet free from all sin. The completion of my salvation is yet to come. In the same way, all believers are adopted into God's family. Right now you are a son or daughter of the king. That cannot change but it will come to full completion in eternity. When we receive our resurrected bodies, our adoption will be complete. It will be fuller, more glorious, more experiential, more complete.

Now let me give you a few applications as we wait for our resurrected bodies.

### **1. It's OK to groan.**

But how do I know the difference between acceptable and normal groaning and complaining. I mean it when I said that this past winter has convicted me all the more about complaining. I would doubt that most Christians get through a single day without complaining, so we have got to make a distinction between complaining and groaning. Here is one way to make a distinction. If you open your mouth, it is likely that you have moved into complaining. Maybe that's just me, but once I verbalize my inward groanings, I have usually stumbled into complaining. This is not to say that we should not share our struggles with one another but do we need to constantly complain about the weather and every other little inconvenience in life? It's OK to groan, but be careful.

### **2. See groaning as the birth pains of your resurrected body.**

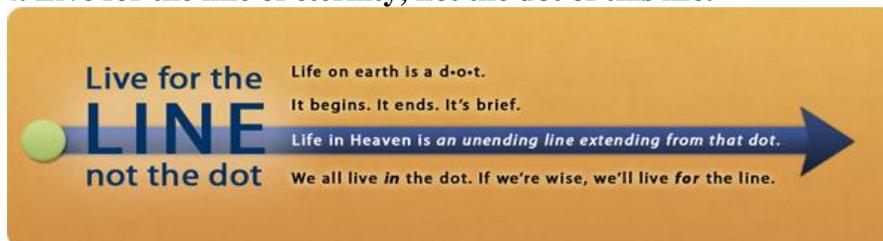
Our church had two babies born in the past week and a half. They happened to both be daughters and they both happened to be third born children, which is kind of cool. Your inward groans are the birth pains of your resurrected body. This is exactly what verses 22-23 stated. I have never experienced birth pains but the Bible tells me that this is how I am supposed to view my inward groanings. They are literally birth pains--or we could say "new birth" pains. Pain now, great glory later.

I like Elisabeth Elliot's definition of suffering. "Suffering is having what you don't want, or wanting what you don't have."<sup>2</sup> Right now, we don't want any kind of suffering. Suffering has eternal purposes but we don't necessarily want it, right? But ultimately, we want what we don't have, which is our resurrected bodies. This is what getting old is all about. Groans will increase but they are mere birth pains.

### 3. Make an impossible comparison.

Paul said that *the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us* but I think God almost dares us to compare. Take the scale idea again. Place all of your suffering, pain and groanings on one side of the scale and your future glory on the other side and compare the two. Walmart offers their low price guarantee. They guarantee that if you compare and find a lower price, they will match it or beat it. God has not said that he will match or beat the price of your suffering. He has said, "It's not even worth comparing." There is no comparison, yet I think he wants us to try. That's the whole point of having an eternal perspective. If you compare the present suffering with the future glory, you will see that there is no comparison. But if your eyes are only on the present suffering, then you can't see the future glory. So go ahead and make the impossible comparison. It's good for you.

### 4. Live for the line of eternity, not the dot of this life.



I borrowed this one from Randy Alcorn. If there is no comparison between now and then, then why do we spend all of our effort on now? Jesus said that we are to lay up treasure in Heaven. Did you do that this week? Did you hoard Heavenly treasure? That's what Jesus meant. He didn't mean to put away a little heavenly treasure, kind of like a rainy day fund or emergency fund, just in case you need it. Instead, he commands us to store up as much heavenly treasure as possible. If you don't know exactly what that means, talk to me later and I will explain it.

### 5. As you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, look forward to your own resurrection.

He died and rose again, not just to rescue from Hell, but to bring you into a perfect relationship with him IN your resurrected body. He wants you to experience this even more than our inward groanings could tell us. It is his plan. He is risen and if you know Him, you too will rise again.

Rich Maurer  
April 20, 2014

---

<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Gateway-to-Joy/The-Gift-of-Suffering.html>)